This special threat advisory is intended to provide situational awareness of threats to public order, public safety, and the security of public officials arising from violent online rhetoric opposing new and ongoing public health restrictions (Information current as of 22 February 2022, 0900hrs). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates as required.

SPECIAL THREAT ADVISORY – UPDATE 8
FREEDOM CONVOY 2022 – BROADER IMPLICATIONS

KEY POINTS

- The IMCIT assesses that anti-government and anti-authority grievances have been strengthened as a result of the Freedom Convoy 2022. Opposition to vaccine mandates continues to grow in intensity and could become a potential flash point for acts of serious violence.

- It is likely that some individuals who were not ideologically motivated prior to the Freedom Convoy 2022 will gravitate towards ideologies to which they have been exposed as a result of the misinformation circulating, specifically surrounding the perception of government overreach and police enforcement.

- The Freedom Convoy 2022 was well-attended due to the participation and support from individuals who had likely never attended previous protests or been connected with ideologically motivated individuals or groups. Though some individuals in attendance at the protest were ideologically motivated, the event also attracted individuals who were not active with ideologically motivated networks.

- Future public order events are likely to continue targeting critical transportation infrastructure, as such actions may be perceived by anti-public health demonstrators as both peaceful and effective for garnering attention to their cause.

- Though the long-term effects of the pandemic response are unknown, once restrictions are lifted, it is likely that anti-government and anti-authority ideological grievances will remain and individuals may gravitate to opposing new grievances that emerge. The IMCIT will continue to maintain visibility on all grievances spanning the traditional ideological spectrum as anti-public health order measures ease.

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INTRODUCTION

The Freedom Convoy 2022 and nationwide solidarity events continue to be a focal point of discussion within anti-public health order networks during this reporting period. The IMCIT assesses that opposition to vaccine mandates continue to grow in intensity and could become a potential flash point for acts of serious violence. This Special Threat Advisory will highlight a number of emerging issues from the convoy which have broader implications.

FREEDOM CONVOY 2022 NARRATIVES

A mix of narratives, some ideological in nature (see footnote for details), have been observed during the course of the Freedom Convoy 2022 which have influenced ongoing national and international solidarity events.

THE AVERAGE PROTESTER

Prior to police enforcement in Ottawa, which began on 18 February 2022, narratives supportive of the convoy indicated a perception that the events in Ottawa were a showing of unity amongst Canadians with a common goal of achieving "freedom" for everyone. A significant amount of social media displayed footage showing people smiling, hugging and dancing, with children playing at the events in Ottawa, which appeared peaceful and lawful, and engaging in social activities that have sometimes been restricted due to public health measures throughout the past two years.

While widely-circulated news media reported references to controversial symbolism seen at various points throughout the original protest events in Ottawa, a perception that the media was trying to discredit the movement was used to counter allegations that the convoy was hateful in nature. Based on observations spanning across social media in regards to the main action in Ottawa, the IMCIT assesses that, although protesters tolerated the presence of hate symbols and ideologically motivated elements, the majority of individuals participating in the protest did not appear to be ideologically motivated themselves. Rather, they were individuals that were frustrated with the COVID restrictions and wanted to simply protest, with no intention of seeking ideologically motivated individuals or groups as allies.

THE IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED PROTESTER (TRADITIONAL RIGHT)

In ideologically motivated[a] conversations, the convoy and perception of global support continues to gain traction among individuals and networks with long-standing grievances that are anti-government, ethno-nationalist, racially motivated and anti-authority in nature and who have had these grievances amplified by government responses to COVID-19. It is likely that much of the misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories related to the convoy originated within ideologically motivated

[a] In this context, "ideologically motivated" represents individuals or networks known to law enforcement before the Freedom Convoy 2022 event or identified during the convoy by their online presence espousing racially motivated, ethno-nationalist, anti-government or anti-authority grievances. This also includes individuals who had previously attended events throughout Canada where the aforementioned grievances were expressed. It is important to note that the presence of ideologically motivated individuals does not necessarily mean ideologically motivated criminality or ideologically motivated violence will occur.

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networks and bled into social networks that would not normally be considered ideologically motivated in nature.

In part, this may be due to the unprecedented momentum that the convoy attracted on social media as a whole. It is unlikely that everyone sharing misinformation was aware of any underlying ideologically motivated intentions. The IMCIT assesses that, in addition to anti-government grievances, there will be persisting anti-authority narratives as a result of this protest due to the images circulating showing a heavy police presence and allegations of police brutality. It is possible that some individuals who were not ideologically motivated previously will gravitate towards ideologies to which they have been exposed as a result of the misinformation circulating, specifically surrounding police enforcement and the perception of government overreach.

THE IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED PROTESTER (TRADITIONAL LEFT)

Ideologically motivated discussions are not limited to those supportive of the ongoing anti-public health order protests. Within other grievance-driven networks[b] that have a visible footprint in Canada, discussions about the convoy have also been observed. It is likely that some individuals involved in organizing protests that typically fall to the left of the ideological spectrum participated in counter-protests opposing the convoy[1] and open source information on anarchist blogs suggests that individuals attended the convoy in Ottawa to observe and report.[2] [3] In addition, narratives have been observed suggesting police or the government will use the events in Ottawa to justify future enforcement during public order activities considered left leaning in nature.[4]

THE *EMERGENCY ACT* NARRATIVE

When implementation of the *Emergencies Act* was announced, it was largely interpreted by protesters as unjust and its use was perceived as sending a message of fear and control by the government. The overall online reaction to the *Emergencies Act* suggests it reinforced narratives observed throughout the pandemic in anti-public health networks which claimed public health measures were a plan by the government to place limits on personal freedoms and another example of abuse of authority.

Discussions critical of the *Emergencies Act* have also been observed in conversations comparing the current situation in Ottawa to the rail blockades of 2020 when no such act was invoked. The ability to freeze bank accounts linked to the convoy resulted in further discussions referencing crowdfunding initiatives for previous high profile public order events, indicating a perception that the convoy fundraiser received undue scrutiny. The official passing of the *Emergencies Act* on 21 February 2022 has amplified these narratives claiming government overreach.

Enforcement of the events specific to Ottawa received widespread media coverage. It is likely that some of the individuals arrested were simply frustrated with the pandemic and took part in an act of civil disobedience. Long-term, this high visibility event has provided an education in enforcement tactics to a widespread audience, which could be exploited at future events by ideologically motivated individuals or groups.

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[b] In this context, "other grievance-driven networks" represents individuals and groups that have historically espoused anarchist and environmental grievances.

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POTENTIAL INSIDER THREAT CONCERNS

Narratives questioning the loyalty and authority of police and the military have been circulating on social media due to the presence of current and serving members appearing to support convoy efforts.

Additionally, a leaked online chat allegedly involving RCMP officers working on enforcement actions related to the convoy has circulated within ideologically motivated networks[5] as well as on other social media. Publicly available photos of the officers named in the chat have also been posted.[6]

These actions present an officer safety issue with respect to doxxing[c], as well as highlight existing concerns of insider threats[7], both of which the IMCIT has reported on previously (see IMCIT STA 02 - 2021-12-02 for more details on officer doxing and IMCIT STA 2022-09 – 2022-02-16 on the potential for insider threats). These issues threaten the integrity of law enforcement operations, affect the national police service's public image and create the appearance of fragmentation within the RCMP. In addition, insider threats jeopardize law enforcement tactics and techniques, which could result in increased criminal sophistication for future activities carried out by ideologically motivated individuals.

The RCMP continues to investigate all such incidents and has issued a public statement on the leaked online chat situation.[8]

FLUID STAGING AREAS

Though downtown Ottawa has been cleared of vehicles and protesters and the compound on Coventry Road has been dismantled, the development of staging areas in rural locations on private land in and close to Ottawa have generated some online discussion, though detailed open source information is limited at this time. It is important to note that, over the duration of the protest, participants likely formed new connections and may be communicating through private networks or in person, which discounts the need for open source advertising. It is possible that discussions about future tactics and actions are likely occurring at these staging locations. Law enforcement continues to be engaged on the evolving situation.

OVERALL THREATS AND CRIMINALITY

The majority of convoy demonstrators across jurisdictions were observed to be engaging in non-violent protests, with police in multiple jurisdictions reporting the issuance of tickets for traffic and noise infractions and mischief.[9] A number of charges reported by police agencies, however, constituted threats to critical infrastructure and/or violence arising from the anti-public health movement. The IMCIT assesses that the perceived success of the convoy demonstrations and anti-authority sentiments in response to police enforcement of the movement may further embolden ideologically motivated individuals to engage in acts of violence or criminality at future public order events.

[c] Posting personal, private or identifying information, usually with malicious intent, is commonly referred to as "doxxing". Refer to IMCIT STA 02 - 2021-12-02 for more details on officer doxxing.

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THREATS TO CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Convoy protest activities affected operations at international ports of entry and ferry terminals. Convoy demonstrations leading to closures of Canada-US border crossings posed significant threats to critical infrastructure with implications affecting economic integrity, international trade, supply chain management, and border integrity. Four ports of entry were severely affected by border blockades set up by protesters:

- The Pacific Highway crossing in Surrey BC was closed for four cumulative days across four weeks[10], and led to the arrests of 16 individuals[11];
- The border crossing in Coutts AB was closed for 16 consecutive days[12] and led to the arrests of at least five individuals[13];
- The border crossing in Emerson MB was closed for six consecutive days[14]; and
- The Ambassador Bridge crossing in Windsor ON was closed for six consecutive days[15] and led to the arrests of at least 25 individuals.[16]

Additionally, protest activities near ports of entry in North Portal SK[17], Niagara ON[18], Cornwall ON[19], and Lacolle QC[20] were also planned but did not affect border operations. Demonstrators in Ottawa circled the international airport in a "slow roll" convoy[21], and demonstrators in Coutts discussed blocking access to airport cargo terminals.[22] Demonstrators in North Sydney NS blocked access to the Marine Atlantic ferry.[23]

Given its widespread implications, these disruptions and blockades garnered significant national and international news media coverage and elicited responses from politicians and public figures, which may be perceived by protesters as a successful tactic to raise awareness around their grievances. The IMCIT assesses that protest activities targeting critical transportation infrastructure are likely to continue in future public order events as such actions may be perceived by anti-public health demonstrators as both peaceful and effective for garnering attention to their cause.

THREAT OF HARRASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

A range of violent activities have been observed during convoy demonstrations, raising concerns for public and officer safety arising from the anti-public health movement. Verbal[24] and physical[25] harassment against healthcare workers have also been observed across jurisdictions over the past few weeks. Additionally, an escalation in anti-mask protests outside schools were observed[26], with one instance culminating in a protester being fined after using racially-charged language towards students.[27] Verbal harassment has also been observed against news media personnel while reporting on convoy events[28], and one protester was observed spitting on a reporter during a live broadcast.[29]

Physical confrontation between convoy protesters and local residents have led to assault charges in at least four instances[30], raising the potential for public safety concerns as social division and tension is likely to increase as demonstrations continue. Concerns for officer safety are also likely to escalate,

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following observations of violence against police at the Pacific Highway protest[31] and the discovery of a conspiracy to murder police officers at the Coutts blockade[32] by individuals associated to an ideologically motivated network which has expressed anti-authority grievances, including some references to the use of violence in relation to public health restrictions.[33]

The IMCIT assesses that convoy protesters' perception that they are receiving widespread support from across the nation may embolden some individuals to act violently or display hostility towards those perceived to be in opposition of the movement, including counter-protesters, healthcare workers, and news media personnel. The threat of violent extremist actors using the convoy demonstrations to advance their ideologies and engage in acts of serious violence is underscored by anti-authority sentiments arising from police enforcement against the demonstrations. It is likely that lone actors or factions within the movement may take advantage of criticisms against the government's use of the *Emergency Act*[34] to continue to sow anti-authority sentiments at the grassroots level which may materialize in threats of violence against law enforcement and government personnel in the future.

NATIONAL OUTLOOK

The IMCIT assesses that the convoy has increased the audience for anti-public health order, anti-government and anti-authority narratives and that protests will persist as the pandemic continues to impact daily life. Any new restrictive measures implemented by any level of government in the future will likely be met with greater opposition than in the past and employ tactics learned through the events of January and February of 2022, such as the use of vehicles in protest, private communications and fundraising mechanisms.

Solidarity actions across Canada are ongoing and continue to receive mainstream and social media attention, largely due to the influence and duration of the Ottawa convoy. Though the long-term effects of the pandemic response are unknown, once restrictions are lifted, it is likely that anti-government and anti-authority ideological grievances will remain and individuals may gravitate to opposing new issues that emerge.

In the past, Canada as a whole has typically been viewed as passive or reactive to issues that spillover from other countries. The widespread perception that Canada has now inspired actions globally has likely emboldened the public order climate within Canada. Nationally, an event titled, "Freedom Chain 2022" is being promoted for 5 March 2022, where the general discussion is suggesting protesters to form a human chain on the TransCanada Highway across Canada.[35] At the time of this writing, little logistics for the event have been planned, however, a Facebook group associated with the action continues to grow[36] and a flyer advertising the event is circulating various social media platforms.

ANTI-PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS - GLOBAL TRENDS

Protest actions, in whole or in part inspired by the Freedom Convoys in Canada, have continued to appear internationally. Convoys to Paris, France[37] and Brussels, Belgium[38] were disrupted by law enforcement checkpoints and barricades before they could cause major issues. Protesters also encamped outside parliamentary buildings in Wellington, New Zealand[39] and Canberra, Australia.[40]

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News reporting indicates that protesters in New Zealand sprayed officers with noxious substances and human excrement, and in one instance attempted to ram officers with a vehicle.[41]

Americans have expressed significant interest in creating convoys to converge on Washington, D.C. in early March, garnering support from prominent political[42] and media figures.[43] The American convoys appear relatively fragmented and disorganized, however, and there does not appear to be any consensus on leadership, routes, or dates, though disrupting President BIDEN's State of the Union Address on 1 March 2022 appears to be a popular goal. Regardless, the perceived effectiveness of the vehicular blockade in Ottawa is likely to inspire similar actions worldwide.

Fringe and ideologically motivated extremist groups have been observed attempting to co-opt anti-public health movements. For example, anti-vaccine protesters outside of a hospital in Boston, Massachusetts were joined by neo-Nazi demonstrators who claimed the hospital's equity policies amounted to anti-white genocide.[44] In Australia, sovereign citizens groups have been observed attending anti-vaccination protest events[45] and appropriating symbols and grievances from Indigenous sovereignty movements.[46] Overall, narratives circulating in anti-vaccine, ethno-nationalist, and conspiratorial ideologies continue to overlap and influence one another.

The IMCIT is liaising with law enforcement partners to maintain visibility on events related to the convoy which are occurring nationally, and will provide updates as required.

Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)
Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence

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